
**A Bill To Amend the Act To Promote the
Education of the Blind**

**EXTENSION OF REMARKS
OF**

HON. JOHN E. FOGARTY

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 18, 1961

Mr. FOGARTY. Mr. Speaker, I am today introducing a bill to amend the act to promote the education of the blind, approved March 3, 1879, as amended, so as to authorize wider distribution of books and other special instruction materials for the blind, and to increase the appropriations authorized for this purpose, and to otherwise improve such act.

The distinguished gentleman from Kentucky, the Honorable FRANK BURKE, is also introducing an identical bill today.

Earlier in this session of the Congress, both Mr. BURKE and I introduced similar bills, H.R. 39 and H.R. 5872, designed to improve this 82-year-old program under which the American Printing House for the Blind receives an annual appropriation through the Depart-

ment of Health, Education, and Welfare in order to provide books in braille and large type, as well as tactual educational aids, for the instruction of blind school-children. Although this federally financed program is small in terms of the numbers of children served and the annual dollar cost, it nevertheless remains one of vital significance to the Nation. For it is with the aid of these special tools provided by the Federal Government that blind children are enabled to receive an education through high school and go on to make their way in life, some with college training for a profession and others with vocational training for a trade, to become self-supporting, contributing citizens in their home communities.

Over the years, there has been a growing trend toward the education of blind children in regular local schools in their home communities with sighted children from their own neighborhoods instead of in special residential schools for blind children only. At present, slightly more than half of the almost 16,000 blind children in the country are being educated in their local schools. In addition, we have been experiencing a sharp increase in the number of blind children in our schools in recent years as those blinded by retrolental fibroplasia over the past 10 years have reached school age. I am happy to say that the cause and prevention of this blinding eye disease in premature babies—too much oxygen in incubators—has been determined through the research effort of the National Institutes of Health. However, we will not reach peak school enrollment for these children for approximately another 5 years; and we shall still have to contend with an increase in the numbers of blind children—fortunately a slower rate of increase—as our total population grows.

Thus, we have two problems to contend with and to solve simultaneously. We must develop an effective mechanism of distributing these federally provided books and educational aids, so that blind children being educated in local schools in their home communities and in the smaller residential schools for the blind will not be handicapped by lack of adequate aids. And we must increase the annual dollar appropriation to meet the increased cost occasioned by the sharp growth in the numbers of blind children.

The original act of 1879, even with its most recent amendments in 1956, does not solve these problems. First, the method of distributing aids and books was devised when all blind children who got a formal education attended residential schools for the blind; and it has not been changed to meet current needs. Second, the authorization of appropriations is limited to \$400,000 annually, an amount woefully inadequate for present and readily foreseeable needs.

The two bills mentioned previously, which Mr. BURKE and I introduced earlier in the session, attempted to meet the needs of the program in different ways. The groups and individuals most concerned about improvements in the program took stands in favor of one bill or the other and gave the impression in

their letters to the Congress of a deep-seated controversy among them.

Inasmuch as the groups concerned are sincerely interested in improving the program, despite differences in approach, we have urged them to resolve their differences. They have responded to this request and have come forward with a two-step plan as follows: First, introduction and, hopefully, enactment before the end of the session without hearings or with brief ones of a bill to provide for a much-needed increase in the authorization of appropriations; and second, development in the fall of legislation to improve the system of distributing books and other aids for consideration by the Congress next session.

The identical bills Mr. BURKE and I are introducing today would implement the first step and make a few additional desirable and agreed-upon changes. These bills would do the following:

First. Increase the authorization of appropriations by removing the statutory ceiling, thus leaving the annual appropriation to normal budgetary and appropriations procedures.

Second. Authorize the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to make rules and regulations governing the administration of the program.

Third. Make a technical correction in the present law, which, if literally construed, would limit expenditures to \$10,000 annually regardless of the amount of the appropriation.

Fourth. Authorize the American Printing House for the Blind to use reasonable sums from the annual appropriation for the salaries and expenses of staff and other experts to assist special committees which may be appointed and for the expenses of such committees.

Fifth. Expand the ex officio board of trustees of the Printing House to include chief State school officers or their designees, thus formally bringing into this program officials of public school programs to join the superintendents of residential schools for the blind.

Sixth. Make these amendments effective immediately upon enactment, so that the much-needed increase in appropriation can be sought for the current fiscal year through a supplemental appropriation.

I sincerely hope that the Committee on Education and Labor and the entire House of Representatives will act on these bills as quickly as is feasible, so that congressional action can be completed before the end of the current session. As I indicated before, all of the interested groups are in favor of this legislation.

Similarly, I hope that the Committee on Education and Labor will give its consideration early in the 2d session of this Congress to another bill which I shall introduce next January to improve the method of distributing books and tactual educational aids for blind children under this same program. By means of this two-step approach we can assure all blind children wherever they may be educated of the educational aids they need to achieve their maximum potential as contributing members of our society.